

*BOATING*

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Messing About in Small Boats

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Reviews

Article by Bob Hicks

There we were, about 30 Melonseeds, a swarm of tiny 13' sailboats, close reaching en masse across Duxbury Bay in a brisk southeast breeze under gray skies, heading for Duxbury Beach, the back side of the barrier beach protecting the bay from the open Atlantic. And the cops were waiting for us.



The cops? Yeah. Two black four-wheel drive sport utilities with flashing blue lights were drawn up on the beach access road directly next to where it appeared our fleet would make landfall. Their operators were out at the edge of the beach in their black uniforms assuming aggressive postures in anticipation of our imminent arrival. What was all this?

Well, I learned later that they were known locally as the "Plover Police". They were here to protect the nesting piping plovers from human egression. They weren't very cordial in explaining their duty. When our glorious leader, Melonseed builder and regatta organizer, Roger Crawford ran his Melonseed up onto the beach to find out what was up, he was curtly informed he was under arrest if he did not immediately depart the beach. His query as to coming ashore further down the beach was answered with, "Certainly, we'll be ready to arrest you there too."

So, Roger sounded the horn, waved off the oncoming fleet and shouted something about how we'd be shot if we landed. He

headed off' the beach and the fleet slowly turned away. Nancy Barrett, in whose boat I was crewing, caught the wind on the opposite tack for the reach back to the cove where we'd all come from, and along with several others continued on back through the chop. Looking back in a while we realized most of the fleet was not following us. Something had happened. Too late, we decided to just carry on anyway. It was beginning to rain and the spray, was soaking me in the "wet puppy" seat at the front of the small cockpit.

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When everyone had returned to the landing at Fran Nichols' 11 cottage" on Eagles Nest Point, protecting the cove, we learned that the harbor master, mortified at what had happened, had come out when he learned of it over the radio and led the fleet to a section of the beach not involved in the plover policing. Roger had cleared the whole plan with him two weeks prior to the regatta so our hostile non-welcome was some surprise to both of them. I suppose those plover police felt threatened, after all 30 mighty Melonseeds were descending on their beach, enough to make any brave man blanch.

Well, this was the high point of excitement in this biggest event of the year for all the "Melonheads" who own and sail Crawford's delightful little daysailers. That 34 of them actually gathered at Fran Nichols' place for this weekend celebration of the summer solstice was some impressive, that's about 25% of the entire production to date. Roger had just finished off #1 27 in time for its happy owner to join the fun. And some came a long, long way. Like Denise Brown from Salt Lake City, and Roger Rodibaugh from Ft. Wayne, Indiana, to name two who have written about their Melonseed adventures on our pages.

And it was fun. No organized racing stuff, no formal programs, no sales hustle even though the builder is the organizer of the regatta. Just the pleasure of the company of 75 like-minded, infatuated "Melonheads". A Friday evening cookout at Fran's place (and what a place, a 1930's beach "cottage" with cathedral ceiling main room with stone fireplace, a wicker furnished enclosed porch overlooking the bay, a handy kitchen with refrigerators full of cold drinks, outside shower rooms for washing off the salt, etc. etc.), a protected cove for launching and retrieving the boats, a wide tidal shore marshland for overnight beaching, sailing the bay Friday, Saturday and Sunday as one wished, and a Saturday evening dinner aboard a Plymouth whale watch ship doubling as a cruise to nowhere boat for three hours.

I had a great time, it was that unique sort of gathering that needs no formal structure. All the folks sharing an affection for the same boat, seemingly without any ego striving to "beat" anyone else, made for a laid back affair. And the boat itself, what a wonderful little boat it is. Only 13' long, very low freeboard, happiest with the solo sailor aboard, but still sailing

right along through the sloppy wind chop that the breeze had built up over the length of the bay with two of us aboard, standing up to that breeze and moving right along at an apparent speed all out of proportion to one's expectations for so short a craft driven by an old fashioned sprit rig mainsail. Read Roger's description of its history and present day reincarnation in the follow-up article.

My thanks to Roger for his invitation, to Fran for her gracious hostessing, to Nancy for taking me along as crew (ballast actually), and to those others who Roger acknowledged as having helped him get it all together. The Melonseed Summer Solstice Regatta '96 was just what Ratty meant when he said, "There is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing about in Melonseeds".